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## IN WHAT PARTICULARS IS THE BIBLE MORE OR LESS FAMILIAR THAN FIFTY YEARS AGO?

### A SYMPOSIUM.

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FIFTY years ago the whole Bible was read more and studied less than it is at the present time. It was then a custom for the family to assemble in the morning and, beginning with the youngest, to "read round," each taking one or two verses until the chapter was completed. In this way the Bible was read through in course. Nothing was omitted. Leviticus and Chronicles were read as faithfully as Matthew and Romans. In the evening the father or mother selected and read the chapter. On Sunday evening verses were recited in friendly competition.

The Bible was then held in peculiar reverence. It was regarded as a holy book to be handled with care, and never to be defaced with pencil marks or "dogs' ears." It was appealed to in matters pertaining to conduct, and especially when quarrels arose. Every word of it was accepted as true. I remember a curious illustration of my own unbounded faith in its literal accuracy. When I was about six years old I came home from school one day and told my father that the teacher in geography had told us that a canal was to be cut through the isthmus of Panama. "But," I said, "it never can be done." "Why not?" asked my father. "Because," I replied, "the Bible says, 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'"

Acquaintance with the Bible was further promoted by its regular use in the public and private schools. The Bible was a part of the school equipment, as much so as an arithmetic or a history. I knew one teacher in a primary school who required of every pupil the memorizing of the Sermon on the Mount. Passages were sometimes selected from the Bible for declamation, a favorite one being the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians.

In the Sunday school the chief exercise was the reciting of Bible verses, and it was not an uncommon thing for a child to commit to memory hundreds and even thousands of verses. The language of the Bible thus entered into the common life and common speech of men. Every prayer was surcharged with quotations, and even a conversation between two neighbors was sure to be brightened by some fitly spoken word from the sacred Book.

In the sense of external acquaintance the Bible was a better-known book among the people fifty years ago than it is now. But the spirit of progress has laid its hand upon this book just as it has upon all other literature, and the effect is most apparent. Today we can answer the question, What is the Bible? with far greater accuracy than our fathers. The old reverence for its external form has disappeared, and the old view-point of its authority is no longer discernible. Yet the reverence is deeper and the authority more commanding. The study of the book as literature has unfolded a diversified beauty and power which has saved it to many a man who would otherwise have cast it aside. Historical criticism has delivered it out of the hands of the skeptic, and exegetical criticism, based on scientific principles and vindicated by discoveries, has made it a veritable Word of Life, and a source of inspiration to many who formerly regarded it only as subsidiary to a dogmatic theology. Never has so much light been thrown upon its history, or on its spiritual and ethical teachings. Archæology, an almost unknown science fifty years ago, is now the most potent revealer of revelation. The study of the philosophy of history has added its illumination to the Bible, and psychology has been keen to discern the thoughts and intents of the sacred writers.

To sum up in a brief word the answer to the above question, I would say that while fifty years ago the outward form, the phraseology, the body of the Bible was more familiar than now, the present generation has a grasp and appreciation of its soul, its spirit, its life, and its light vastly better than that of fifty years ago. Today the timid doubter and the fearless seeker

may take with unhesitating confidence the inductive method of systematic study, and be sure of reaching the conclusion of the psalmist :

A lamp unto my feet is Thy Word,  
A light unto my path.

THEOPHILUS P. SAWIN.

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Fifty years ago the parts of a sermon were introduction, proposition, discussion, application, conclusion. Of these five parts, the fourth has gradually disappeared. The sermon of today is not, indeed, destitute of applications, but they do not form a separate part of it—distinct and significant; without it the preacher's work was not only unfinished, but its chief purpose was neglected; this was a part of the sermon expected by the congregation, and containing the practical reasons why the sermon was preached.

The object of these applications was to bind the Christian religion upon conscience, affections, will, life. The doctrine of the text having been explained and established, the preacher was then ready to say to his hearers: "These are its consequences, lay them to heart and put them into practice." It is but a commonplace to say that by this means the sermon was more likely to get itself remembered than by any other means.

A further, and a more serious consideration, is that which has been urged by such authors as Bishop Butler, that to listen to the claims of truth and virtue, and to have the emotions momentarily stirred thereby, but not to have what has been heard put solidly into conduct, is not only damaging to moral character, but also a loss in ability to apprehend and keep in mind that which is right and true.

In the preaching of fifty years ago, the Bible was the text-book and authority; the sole text-book, the absolute authority. Doctrines, precepts, history, whether for imitation or for warning, or for motives, were all found in Holy Scripture. That was the sacred, the all-sufficient record of the one revelation, the one religion, given from heaven to mankind.

Accordingly, the truths which were then heard from the pulpit, and impressed upon the mind and memory of the congregations, were such as the following: man's sinful, lost condition; the Son of God taking man's nature upon him, and by his perfect life and atoning death redeeming mankind from the guilt and dominion of sin; his resurrection, and ours through him; his intercession for us, and his second coming; the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; the shortness and uncertainty of human life; the day of the general judgment; heaven and hell: in a word, the gospel of our salvation. There was, at that time, a constant urgency to make our calling and election sure. It was heartily felt to be of but little importance what one's earthly prosperity or happiness might be, if only he were admitted finally to be a citizen of that Jerusalem whose streets are gold, and within whose walls is no sorrow or pain. The earthly life is a mere pilgrimage, a dream, a vapor; but useful beyond words to tell, as the moment in which we may prepare for eternity. And salvation is only through the incarnate Son of God; not by process of evolution, or by vague and careless hopes.

In the foregoing particulars the Bible was "more familiar" fifty years ago than it is now. And, if in these, it would follow that it was also "more familiar" in those subjects which belong under the head of "Christian ethics." Selfishness was less intense, and Christ's rule was less widely forgotten: "Whatsoever things ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." There was a more sensitive integrity, an honor more pure and noble, and a resolution more inflexible to find one's contentment and peace in the approval of a good conscience, and in conduct which one's inmost self-respect could not condemn.

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I find that people who have better opportunities than I differ very widely in their opinion upon this subject. My sister Lucretia was one of the women members of our school committee thirty years ago. In the first class of girls educated in the

school under her special care, some conversation in the class called attention to the deluge and Noah's ark. Out of a class of sixteen girls of sixteen years of age—girls well instructed in one of our best grammar schools—only two had ever heard of the deluge or of Noah's ark. One was a Boston girl who had been in a Boston Sunday school; the other was an English girl who had been in a Church of England Sunday school. The others were mostly Roman Catholics.

I have myself known one of the best-educated young women in New England, as schools go, ask, "Who was Samson anyway?" when there was some allusion to the power of a man being in the curls of his hair. The Boston *Transcript*, our best newspaper here, had to speak of the Lord's Supper in an account of the Evangelical Alliance and called it the "London Supper," the proofreader having apparently never heard of the Lord's Supper. I preached a Christmas sermon in New York two years ago, and after the sermon I was waited upon by six reporters from different journals. (It always happens to reporters of sermons that they are delayed till the close of the benediction before they arrive at church.) I said to them that the text was from the Song of the Angels at the birth of Christ. Two out of the six had heard of the Song of the Angels. The other four knew nothing about it, and had to be told what it was and when it was. I could multiply such instances, as all of us could.

On the other hand, I see in the speeches of public men adroit and significant instances which show that they are curiously well read in Scripture. I was at a very brilliant dinner party of politicians a year or two ago, where two senators of the same name were spoken of. One of the wittiest of the guests, speaking of one of the two, said, "not Iscariot," and the point was instantly taken by every one of the twenty statesmen at the table.

It seems to me that the scriptural points made in Congress are very promptly accepted and taken. And, while it is certainly bad form, either in the Senate or House, or lately in the English Parliament, to quote Latin, it seems to me that the quotations from Scripture are accepted with pleasure in Congress or the state legislatures.

I am perhaps traveling out of the line assigned me when I say that I think a closer alliance between the supervisors of day-school and Sunday-school superintendents might materially improve on the whole position at present.

When I studied Goodrich's *History of the United States* as a boy of eight years, I was struck, boy-like, with the statement that when Washington wished to return over the East River, in August, 1776, Providence threw a fog over the river to assist in the operation. I could not but observe that this was the only occasion, between the years 1492 and 1830, when God or his law was said to have had anything to do with the history of the United States.

Now, I understand very well the jealousy about religious instruction in the public schools, yet I cannot but think that if any well-equipped Sunday school were informed in advance by school supervisors as to the studies of the day schools in history, in politics, in natural history, in sociology, as in temperance, or about imprisonment, the Sunday schools could every week prepare proper lessons to be given by competent teachers, improving the tone of the common-school work and sanctifying it.

I was once at a so-called "reform school," under the management of this state, and I made the chaplain talk freely about the Sunday-school institution. The school had not been long opened, but he told me that they had advanced only as far as the Plague of Flies, that this would be the subject for the next Sunday. Pressing my inquiry, I found that he had separated the Bible into two-hundred and sixty lessons, which covered five years of fifty-two Sundays each. We were at the Plague of Flies at that moment, and we should come out on the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule if we lived three years and a half longer. Those boys undoubtedly had a certain knowledge, such as it was, of certain parts of the Bible, but I am glad to say that their successors in the same school know more about it, on the whole, than they did then.

EDWARD EVERETT HALE.

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The Bible is a vastly better-known book than it was fifty years ago. It is known to more people. Its circulation has increased threefold and more in these fifty years. The great British and Foreign Bible Society in 1853 issued only 1,168,794 volumes of Scriptures. Its issues last year were 5,067,421. The American Society fifty years ago issued 815,399 volumes. Its figures for 1902 (the returns for 1903 are not at this writing made up) are 1,723,791. This takes no account of the immense editions of individual publishers in Europe, England, and America, which have increased, I should say, at least tenfold in this period. Few persons realize the wonderful annual output of Bibles at the present time.

The Bible is known to people in whose language it was not translated fifty years ago: Chinese dialects, the speech of African tribes, the language of the South Sea Islanders have during this time been invaded, and the invasion is still in progress. This is making the Book a familiar book where in the middle of the nineteenth century it was unknown.

Much has been done also to bring the Bible to the homes of the Roman Catholic peoples of Europe and the Americas. Considerably more than a million volumes of Spanish, English, Portuguese, and other Bibles, Testaments, and Scripture portions have during this period been circulated in Latin America by the American Bible Society alone.

To our own and all peoples the Bible is better known in all that relates to its form and setting. The results of critical scholarship have given us a much more accurate text, so that everybody may know today with certainty what Jesus and Paul said, as the scholars only knew it fifty years ago.

An incalculable light has also during these decades been thrown on the manners and customs of the Scripture ages. And the light has been disseminated by the manifold agencies of the Sunday school and other religious publications beyond all reckoning.

There abides also a more intimate knowledge of the Bible on the part of the leaders of the people than some are ready to admit. Orations like that of Mr. Hay on President McKinley,



President Roosevelt's public addresses, and similar utterances, take many of their most striking figures and allusions from the Bible.

I am persuaded, however, that in the average Christian home the Bible is crowded from its pre-eminence in the reading of the family by the omnipresent magazine and paper; and that where it is read it is not read as it used to be, lovingly, absorbingly, for guidance and inspiration, as if life hung upon it and its message alone could direct in the daily choices and the great crises, and comfort and strengthen in the hours of testing and sorrow.

The critical knowledge of the Bible has increased many fold in fifty years. The devotional use of the Bible has waned. We are more familiar with the shell; we are less familiar with the kernel of the Scripture. We should study to lead the coming generation from the outer into the inner courts of the temple.

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There can be little question that in important particulars familiarity with the Bible has diminished during the past half-century. Acquaintance with it was formerly secured by its use in the devotions of the family. Either the Scriptures were read through in course day by day at household worship, or favorite books were selected for the purpose; in the latter case what was lost in knowledge of the Bible as a whole was compensated for by the greater familiarity acquired with favorite portions which became household classics. In either case, Hebrew and Jewish history was imbedded in the memory of the members of the family, the great characters of Old Testament times were as well known as the patriots of the American Revolution, and the very phrases of prophesy and psalm recurred to the mind like well-known stately anthems. This result was greatly facilitated by the custom of memorizing Scripture with exactness, many chapters and even whole books being thus treasured. The use of the Bible in schools was also considerable, and in the hands of thoughtful teachers was a means of introducing those

whose home-life was less devout to the treasures of Bible history, teaching, and song. Theological discussion was more prevalent formerly than now, and as the Bible was the armory of weapons for dogmatic defense or attack, "proof-texts" were kept ready for use and contexts could be readily cited.

In the haste and distraction of the present time much of all this has been changed. The occupations of the day seize upon the various members of the family before they have taken time for united religious service. Attractive ephemeral literature supersedes the Bible with many young readers. The use of the Word of God in the schools has been pronounced unconstitutional in some of our Christian commonwealths and has become neglected in others.

The loss in these ways has been great and is to be deplored. Allusions in literature and public address to biblical history or doctrine or precept are now but vaguely appreciated or entirely unrecognized by those who are fairly well acquainted with current authors; and education is impoverished by the lack of those moral and spiritual elements formerly supplied by the reading and study of the Scriptures. That the Chinese minister Wu should characterize us as a nation that gives no moral education to the young may at least furnish us food for reflection.

There are, however, other aspects of the situation which are more cheering. A new study of the Bible has grown up in colleges and in many homes, using the method and apparatus of modern research. A historical perspective has been gained, enabling us to see the men of the Bible moving among their contemporaries in a genuinely human fashion. If some of the criticism employed has been dogmatic and subjective, much of it has helped to a better understanding of the conditions under which revelation was written and lived, and to a vital sympathy with the on-going kingdom of God. While the devotional use of the Bible has probably diminished, the historical study has greatly increased, together with the appreciation of the literary structure and spirit of the various books. Many who had found it difficult to maintain vital interest in a book which seemed unrelated to ordinary experience, now approach it with quickened

pulse and study it with delight. If Christian reverence and Christian scholarship will unite in a constant ministry of the Word to human need, in home and Sunday school, in Christian association, church and college, the new familiarity with the Bible may in extent and value exceed the old.

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It is not possible to give an unqualified answer to the above question. In some respects an affirmative and in others a negative answer is necessary. There is a better knowledge of the Bible among certain classes of students than fifty years ago, while among others the knowledge is less accurate and satisfactory. I have an impression that the average modern student of the Bible would be less prompt and accurate in giving quotations from the Bible than the average student of fifty years ago. The custom so prevalent then for children to memorize the Scripture has fallen into decay. A critical observer in a conference of learned and scholarly men on religious subjects two or three years ago kept an accurate record of the quotations from Scripture given by the various speakers. He was very much surprised to note the multitude of inaccuracies in quoting. The same observer made a similar study of biblical quotations given by the late Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, and was equally impressed with the accuracy of his quotations. Moody's knowledge was doubtless less scholarly and in many respects less accurate than that of the other class of speakers, but he had memorized Scripture to better advantage.

Undoubtedly there is a better knowledge of the structure of the Bible and the method of revelation than fifty years ago. There is a more profound and critical grasp by scholars of the various questions pertaining to the Bible. There is greater knowledge of the original text of the Scripture. The work in textual criticism in recent years has greatly improved our text. Unquestionably also there is a more widespread knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written, especially among ministers.

My impression is that the chief mark of superiority of present knowledge of the Bible over that of fifty years ago is in part in the minute critical knowledge which has come to scholars through the pursuit of the historical method, and in part in this, that the historical method has illuminated the Bible in a large way and at many points, and has greatly improved the general knowledge of the structure and meaning of the Scriptures. At these points there has been a decided gain. I think it may also be said that among the masses of people there is more knowledge *about* the Bible than fifty years ago, while there is probably less first-hand knowledge *of* the Bible. There are many reasons for this. Our modern method of Sunday-school teaching tends to substitute the lesson helps for the Scripture text. The confining of the lesson to a few verses of Scripture also tends to confine the view to a small portion of the Scripture instead of stimulating Bible study in a larger way. This, of course, does not condemn the method, but only indicates one of its defects. Then, too, there is a multitude of substitutes for the Bible. Bible stories for children in many homes take the place of the original stories as contained in the Scriptures. The multiplication of devotional books has led many Christians to neglect their Bibles for devotional books and daily helps of various kinds. The prevalent conditions have affected the pulpit also. Much of the preaching of the day is far from expository in character. Instead of dealing with the text in a large and vital way, the minister is too often content with a topic selected from current events. It would greatly stimulate Bible study if the pulpit would return to expository preaching.

There has been a change, too, in the doctrinal method. Men no longer resort to the old proof-text way of establishing doctrinal points, at least not to the same extent as formerly. There is both a gain and a loss here. The gain is in the larger and more adequate view of the meaning of Scripture and the escape from artificial and false meanings often given to texts to establish a doctrine. The loss is in the direction of accuracy and minute knowledge of particular texts by the average preacher.

Then, too, knowledge of the Bible has become far more

widely diffused through current literature than in time past. This further illustrates what was stated above, that there is more knowledge *about* the Bible, while there is less accurate knowledge *of* the Bible. Doubtless the ethical teachings and principles of the Bible have thus obtained a wide currency. I am profoundly convinced that there is a sad lack of knowledge among the people at large of the historical facts of Scripture. The multiplication and cheapening of books of all kinds have rendered the struggle of the Bible for its old place in the time and affection of the people a difficult one.

The above is the situation as it appears to me. Out of it there arise two chief problems. The first is that of conquering a larger place for the Bible in our modern life and interests. Somehow we must enlist the interest of the people in the study of God's revelation as recorded in this book. The second problem is that of establishing better methods of Bible study in order to extend a mastery of its contents over a wider area of those who nominally accept its teachings.

The prescribed limits of this article do not admit of my enlarging upon any of these points. Some of them are of great interest and need discussion.

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The materials for the answer are one's own observation and experience, and the records of observation and experience on the part of others. The value of the personal testimony depends evidently upon the extent and accuracy of observation and the field of the experience. The opportunities of the present witness have been afforded in twenty-five years in the pastorate, in close contact with institutions of learning and in constant service as a teacher of the Bible to young people and adults. Added to this, in the last few years, there has been an acquaintance of special intimacy with the mental habits of men of all sorts in the ministry and with Sunday-school teachers.

There is no doubt that the "personal equation" largely col-

ors the deductions both from experience and observation. One who believes, as I do, with a steadfast faith, that the reign of Jesus Christ was never so real and extensive as today, and counts the knowledge of him in the record of divine revelation as the necessary condition of it, could hardly avoid a difference of interpretation from the *laudator acti temporis* who is sure that the present world is an old wreck, on the point of breaking up.

Nevertheless it seems to me that there is much less verbal familiarity with the Bible than there was in the early part of my own ministry, especially among ministers and people who are approaching forty years of age. This is no doubt due in part to the temporary disuse in Sunday-school instruction, in the decade when these were children, of the special emphasis which had previously been put upon the memorizing of Scripture. It is to be noted with approval that in the last ten years there has been a return, with greater intelligence, to something of the old insistence. Perhaps this loss in familiarity with the very words of the Bible has grown also out of a general sentiment, fed by the publication of a variety of English versions of the Scripture, that its meaning is vastly more important than the terms in which it is expressed.

It also appears that there is less now than twenty-five years ago, of that sort of familiarity with the Bible which was the result of reading it "in course" from cover to cover, privately and in household worship. It is by no means to be allowed that the Bible is less read, privately or in the home, but it is in selected portions. That there is loss on this account can hardly be disputed. I am not disposed to deny that there is gain also, but it is no part of this note to balance them. While in these two particulars the Bible appears to me less familiar than it once was, there has been, as I see it, a marvelous gain in recent years for the Bible, in that it has become a more *real* book, and so in the best sense more familiar. It illustrates what is meant if one recalls how impossible it would be for the Christian of average intelligence of today to resort to the haphazard opening of his Bible for a "word of God" to give him guidance in a matter of difficulty. Such treatment of the Bible was not at all uncommon no more than a score of years ago.

Taking into account my own experience and the changed attitudes of those with whom I have been most conversant, it would seem that the Bible had become more familiar in these four respects at least :

1. Its setting, the historical conditions out of which its several portions grew, have become, in a measure, matter of common knowledge. It is this which more than anything else has given a new "reality" to the book.

2. There has come in a better sense of the drift and trend of the whole Bible. This has illuminated it for those who had previously been disciplined in the reading of it "by course."

3. There has come to be a diffused, and more or less clear, sense that the meaning of the Bible is not in its separate verses, but in its separate portions, regarded as units. And with this there has come a great increase in the number of those who study, not verses, but books, to get their intended message, so that these "wholes" are vastly more familiar than a generation ago.

4. There is a more general discrimination between intelligent and unintelligent knowledge of the Bible than a generation ago. The second great law of interpretation, if indeed it be the second, "Use your common-sense," is recognized, as it was not once, and the typical and "spiritual" interpretations, that were received with delight only a little while ago, are generally discredited by intelligent audiences.

There was an old familiarity with the Bible; there is a new familiarity with it. They are different the one from the other. On the whole, the new is better. Its chief characteristic is that to it the Bible is a *real* book. Its lines are those of permanent advance. For the last decade the splendid work of the primary teacher has been adding to it the element of value that was in the old familiarity, and the outlook is good for a generation that in the best sense shall be "familiar" with the Bible.

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